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For Immediate Release
August 5, 2005

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Environment Department Investigating Theft of Construction Gauge

(Santa Fe, NM) -- The New Mexico Environment Department's (NMED) Radiation Control Bureau (RCB) was notified on Friday, August 5 that a piece of construction site equipment containing two sealed radioactive sources has been stolen from the State Fair grounds in Albuquerque. The Troxler Electronics gauge, model 3430, serial number 29090, is the property of AMEC Earth & Environmental, Inc. It is commonly used to test moisture and density of construction materials such as asphalt, dirt and concrete. The gauge and its transport container were taken some time between 11 p.m. Thursday night, August 4, and 1:00 a.m. Friday morning, August 5. The theft occurred in a parking lot adjacent to the Downs at Albuquerque, Racetrack and Casino. The locked chain securing the gauge to the truck had been cut.

The radioactive sources in the gauge are hazardous. One source of radiation is a 10 millicurie Cesium-137 source, and the other is a 50 millicurie Americium-241/Beryllium source. Prolonged exposure of the body to the radiation field can cause burns and tissue damage. Ingestion of the radioactive materials can cause extensive organ damage, and can be lethal.

If the gauge is found, it should not be handled. Do not tamper with the gauge or any of its parts, especially the source rod. The safest course of action is to keep a distance of at least fifteen feet from the gauge and immediately contact the following people:

John Parker, NMED Radiation Control Bureau Chief, (505) 827-1080; Debbie Keyes, Corporate Radiation Safety Officer, AMEC Earth & Environmental, (480) 940-2320; or Environment Department emergency number, (505) 827-9329, non-emergency: (505) 428-2500, or voice mail: 1-866-428-6535.

The United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Colorado and Utah radiation authorities have been notified. The manufacturer of the device has also been notified.

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Unlawful possession of radioactive material is a violation of the New Mexico Radiation Protection Act (Chapter 74, Article 3 NMSA 1978) and the New Mexico Radiation Protection Regulations (20.3 NMAC), under which violators are subject to penalties. A gauge cannot be transferred or sold without filing legal paperwork.



This is a picture of a Troxler Electronics model 3430 gauge with the source rod in the "safe" position. One radioactive source is located inside the base portion of the container near the bottom towards the right, and the other is located in the bottom of the upright metal source rod on the right. If the upright metal rod is extended below the bottom of the gauge, more serious exposures could occur.

“We don’t wish to alarm the public, only to ask them to be on the lookout for this gauge and to contact us if they think they may have seen it or have any information on its whereabouts,” said John Parker, NMED Radiation Control Bureau Chief. “The public’s knowledge and involvement are often key in these cases.”

For additional information, contact Jon Goldstein, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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